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CURRENT OPINION

Has the Clergy Failed in Leadership?

A remarkable article from the pen of Rev. J. H. Odell, which appeared in the February number of the *Atlantic Monthly* under the title "Peter Sat by the Fire and Warmed Himself," has caused considerable stir among the churchmen of America. Mr. Odell asks, Where was the spiritual leadership of America during the thirty-two months when Europe and Asia were passing through the early Gehenna of war? What prelate or bishop or ecclesiastical dignitary undertook the work of spiritual interpretation? What convocation, or conference, or assembly spoke convincingly to the national conscience? Altar and pulpit were silent. Such silence cannot be excused on the basis of the President's plea for neutrality. Since when and on whose authority have prophets and apostles surrendered their spiritual function of interpretation into the keeping of rulers and cabinets? The case for the clergy is made worse when one realizes that the conscience of America has been educated to the real meaning of the world-tragedy by laymen—novelists, artists, soldiers—while the ordained leaders stood idly aside. Still worse, the clergy knew the facts with regard to the German mind; knew where German thought had placed the old sacred things of Christianity; knew the attitude of the German spiritual leaders to the state and to mankind; yet they were silent. The very fact that the clergy of Germany had capitulated as slaves of the Kaiser and had given up the old glory of spiritual heroism in the name of righteousness should have stirred America's spiritual leaders. "The preachers of America who had all the facts on their library shelves and in current periodic literature never uttered an indictment loud enough to cause the male members of their churches to fizzle a drive

in their Sunday morning foursome at the Country Club."

Jesus Christ was of a different stamp. One wonders whether the ministry has ever studied the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He took, in the teeth of his people's hopes, the path which led to death. He struck the pride of his people in the face and cut the underpinning from beneath their popular philosophy. No one has outranked him in manhood, heroism, fortitude. Confronted with anything which destroyed human rights the kindly smile died from his face and the cloud of awful anger gathered on his brow.

Would Jesus of Nazareth have been neutral in word and thought while Germany was raping Belgium, distributing typhus germs throughout Siberia, instigating and guiding Turkey in the slaughter of the Armenians, tearing up treaties and rending international law, assassinating Edith Cavell and Captain Fryatt, shielding its soldiers during the Piave fighting with the bodies of Italian women, sinking hospital ships, and acting generally on all the highways of the world like a carefully organized band of demented fiends?

If not, then why was the modern ministry so scrupulously neutral, so benignly dumb? In spite of a few scattered voices it must be solemnly stated that the vastest of the world's tragedies came and the church was not its interpreter.

When America did awake, it was not the church, but the Young Men's Christian Association which came forward to serve as the social, moral, and spiritual guide and guardian of the soldiers. In spite of all, there are ministers everywhere still building denominational fences as though the war had not changed everything. "Though the whole world be in the crucible and every institution on the earth be in the melting-pot, yet the Christian church must be permitted

to jog along, doing as it has always done, feeling as it has always felt, and enjoying the dignity and reverence it has always claimed." But laymen are awake. They see now that only essentials count. They are demanding an immediate spiritual interpretation of the present awful world-drama. Spiritual meanings throb in modern world-events. Cannot the clergy read them for the people? Spiritual opportunities such as those of today come but rarely in the life of the race. If the ministry cannot lead now, what place can it expect to hold in the new world that will follow the war?

Out of a flood of replies, some bitter, but many enthusiastic in approval, the April number of the *Atlantic Monthly* carries the reply of Reverend George Parkin Atwater under the title, "Peter Stood and Warmed Himself." He feels that neutrality, pacifism, complacency, denominationalism, and the German theories in theology and statecraft deserve the castigation given them. But a defense may be made of the modern American clergy. Theirs is no easy task amid the feverish soap-box oratory and the popular turmoil of today. These men are not fiery-tongued orators saturated with the wisdom of the ages and commanding vast assemblages; neither are they luxurious and isolated devotees of idle reflection. They are hard-working, underpaid, long-suffering plodders living lives of sacrifice in every corner of the land. They do their duty humbly and quietly. They have no adequate way of reaching the public, for people will not come to their churches and the newspapers prefer a prize fight to religion. Yet they are a vast influence. As a matter of fact it is the church, not the home, which gives the rising generation what moral education it has. It has not been the example of the worldlings which has inspired the flower of the nation to offer itself for service overseas; that was the work of the churches and the clergy. "The church boys went to war at the call. It

was not our Christian young manhood that was lashed into war with the draft."

The church has spoken in deeds. The Young Men's Christian Association and the Red Cross are really the church at work. If they did not exist they would have to be created as the instruments by which a united church might serve its soldiers. Moreover, the complete representative of the American church in France is the United States Army overseas. Our Army is preaching the sermon of the American church to Germany. If the church had opposed war or had sat by the fire warming itself, the nation could not have put an army overseas without draft riots. The church prepared the people. No power on earth could have silenced the thousands of voices that arose from Christian pulpits. "The clergy and the church of our nation spoke and spoke with power. Hot, faying, excoriating, scarifying words of righteous indignation and anger have been poured out from our pulpits." The clergy spoke plainly. No one man, however pre-eminent, could have produced the smallest fraction of the result that the thousands of clergy produced in so interpreting the deeper issues of the war. Conventions also have spoken. Both in deeds and words the church has shown that she stands on the side of right against wrong and in a war to victory.

After his defense Dr. Atwater strikes a new note of deep seriousness:

Today the duty of the church is slowly getting a different emphasis. The church must and will set its face against the moral iniquity, the utterly unpardonable desertion of its cause, of concluding a peace based on any other consideration than the complete mastery and dissipation of every evil organization or movement of government which has shown itself to be the cruel and heartless foe of humanity. Better that every man in America should go to the plains and farms to wrest a living from the soil, better that every woman should turn again the spinning-wheel and churn, better that every vestige of our material civilization be swept

away than that we should compromise the issue between righteousness and evil. Now is the time for the church to awaken to its new peril of bankruptcy and demolition unless it begins at once to speak, as it has spoken for war, for the complete and final and overwhelming victory for righteousness which alone will save mankind from a moral decay more fatal than death.

The Christian Doctrine of War

The foregoing theme is the subject of a lengthy essay in the January number of the *Princeton Theological Review* by Professor William Brenton Greene, Jr. Over against the contention that the continuance of war proves the failure of Christian ethics he argues that Christianity makes no claim as to the cessation of war. Christianity and war are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The powerlessness of Christian ethics has not been established by the war, for Christianity makes no claim for her ethics apart from the supernatural religion of the divine Christ from which the ethics have been divorced.

Moreover, war has in itself a moral effect when carried on as a means of obtaining or maintaining justice. Defensive war emphasizes the unique worth of the spiritual. It teaches us to sacrifice wealth, health, comfort, family, even life, for the right. Hence they misconceive the attitude of Christian ethics who teach that it is never right to go to war.

Individual and National Ethics

The *New Republic* for March 23 has an article from the pen of Professor John Dewey entitled "Morals and the Conduct of States," in which he sets forth the cause of the separation of private and public morals and points out the consequences of an assimilation of national and private codes to each other. The lamentation over the gulf which separates the morality of the good individual and the ethics of nations overlooks the fact that morals are relative to social

organization. Individuals have to be moral because they can. They can be because they are partakers in modes of associated life which confer powers and impose responsibilities. States are non-moral in their activities because of the absence of an inclusive society which defines and establishes rights.

Until nations are bound together by the law of a social order there cannot be any truly moral obligations existing among them. It might be a source of weakness to any one nation which should attempt to order its relations to others in genuinely moral terms before the higher social order was achieved. All protests, all sentimental vituperations of the wickedness of war, all demands for higher national morality are empty unless one is willing to fight for the establishment of a social organization which will make moral responsibilities and regulations a fact.

We are still incredibly subjectivistic in our moral ideas. If only there were a general recognition of the dependence of moral control upon social order all of the sentiment and well-wishing opinion that is now wasted would be utilized to establish a definitely organized federation of nations, not merely that certain moral obligations might be enforced, but also that a variety of new obligations might come into existence. The task of the league of nations is, not merely to make war more difficult, but to care for the economic and social needs which are now at the mercy of chance and at the ambition of individual states. Warlikeness is not the cause of war; a clash of interests due to the lack of organization is the cause. A supernational organization which oversees, obviates, and adjusts the clashes will focus moral energies now scattered and make operative moral ideas now futile. It will align the moral code of state behavior with the best which obtains as to personal conduct. More than that, it will generalize that secularization or humanization of

morals which is now so halting and vagrant that it leads many persons to escape supernaturalism only to land in a half-suppressed skepticism as to the possibility of any intelligent and objective morals, anything beyond social convention or personal taste.

But it must be fought for. In just the degree in which the American conception of the war gains force and this war becomes a war for a new type of social organization it will be a war of compelling moral import.

A Retrospect and an Anticipation

Under the above title, Richard Roberts makes a survey of the period, 1517-1917, in the January *Hibbert Journal*. The Protestant Reformation was pre-eminently a revival of religion—it affirmed a spiritual principle which reached the springs of life and which has since determined the course of human affairs in other spheres than the religious. First appearing as a religious fact and a religious power it grew into a fact and a power over the whole life of man. The essential history of the modern world is the history of the fortunes of this principle of individualism in its application to human affairs.

In his lectures on the Turks, Newman argued that civilization passes through three stages—the age of faith, the age of analysis and scepticism, the age of materialism. Edward Carpenter has pointed out that no civilization has passed through the last stage; when this stage is reached dissolution and relapse to barbarism follow. "Where there is no vision the people perish." Mr. Roberts sees these stages in the post-Reformation world. First came the enthusiasm of the age of the new freedom. Then the criticism of English Deists, German Rationalists, and French Encyclopedists so discredited the religious synthesis that even the eighteenth-century evangelical revival could not stop the passage from skepticism to the age of materialism. "It is the tritest of commonplaces to call the nineteenth

century the age of materialism." So the modern world has run through Newman's three stages—may the present inferno of desolation and anguish be the tragic finale of a civilization?

Mr. Roberts feels that hope lies in another strand of the Reformation principle. With the Puritan resistance to the state-imposed religious practices began the struggle for modern political freedom. The struggle for religious liberty thus became a struggle for political liberty—so at length entered the era of democracy. "The reformation abolished the vested interests of the religious caste; the French revolution abolished the vested interests of the political caste; the next step will be the abolition of the vested interests of an economic caste—the plutocracy, the money power." The coming revolution is the affirmation of liberty as against privilege resting upon property. The age that is passing has been great and memorable in the achievement of freedom; perhaps its death-agonies are the birth-pangs of another principle of life without which freedom never can be perfect. The banner of the old order bore the word "Freedom"; the banner of the new will have the legend "Freedom and Fellowship." "And perhaps the church may be redeemed by the gift of a new prophetic word—a new evangelism which will call men to bind their brethren to themselves in a living comradeship."

Efficient Democracy

The demand is becoming insistent that we shall understand the meaning of democracy. In the March number of the *Scientific Monthly* Professor A. H. Wright has an article entitled "Scientific Criteria for Efficient Democratic Institutions" in which he answers the questions: What is the aim of democratic government? How may it escape the dangers due to conditions bred of its chiefest virtues? How may it, in a social order as yet imperfectly understood, find

the knowledge and method necessary for the formulation and prosecution of social policies vital to its continued existence?

For America the first question is answered by saying that the maximum possible of personal liberty and individual opportunity constitutes the aim and justification of our political life. Hence the material and social resources must be developed to the full. Our present political institutions do not satisfy this ideal requirement. Can the social scientist show the way? He is not yet sure of his standards; but for him a more difficult problem is that he is faced by the power of the professional politician. Accompanying the remarkable material progress of the last fifty years there has been a steady deterioration of government in quality and in power. A political stock-taking would show the national government restricted in power as is no other great government because based on a constitutional system constructed in apprehension of rather than in confidence in democratic institutions. The entire system is managed by party leaders who must placate supporting interests and who rarely venture upon disinterested public service. Legislation and administration reflect class demands. Governments thus become mere prizes of power and their results, spoils, concessions, or compromises.

What can be done? How can a democracy be persuaded to change its habits? Mr. Wright suggests: Since the professional politician finds the ease with which the franchise may be secured to be his mainstay, the franchise ought to be limited to those who undergo a preliminary training, who pass a psychological test and who, at registration, show a knowledge of issues and platforms involved. Furthermore, leaders should be trained in universities with the express purpose of entering local politics. The method of introducing bills in the legislature should be changed so as to give the program of the executive right of way.

Finally, constitutional changes should be made in a different way. Periodically the whole social and economic structure of the governmental area should be examined and then a governmental organization framed in the light of this information for the realization of democratic aims without regard to the framework of the past. "If throughout our operation of political institutions we advance patiently to the acceptance of the experimental attitude and the method of social diagnosis as our basis of action democracy may presently be safe for scientific standards."

The League of Nations

That the League of Nations idea is being taken seriously is evidenced by the amount of discussion given to it in the leading journals. The *Contemporary Review* for January carries an article from Lord Parmoor on the subject. He thinks the time has come when the whole question involved in the phrase "the League of Nations" should be carefully studied in a sympathetic spirit. The main argument of its advocates is that it will give permanency to the coming peace, at any rate that it will be a substantial safeguard against the outbreak of aggressive warfare and protect the innocent party against the wrongdoer. It is necessary to insist however that the central powers be included in the league and that an effective sanction be established against war. An effective sanction implies the possibility of an ultimate resort to force. Hence a preliminary should be disarmament, for the power of each member of the league should not be so constituted as to menace the power of the whole co-partnership or to make necessary the maintenance of an excessively large league force. In addition to disarmament there must be established, not an arbitration tribunal, but a permanent international court, judicial in character, and free from all suspicion of partiality. The Supreme

Court of the United States or the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England suggests the type.

The decision of the international court would have to be backed by an adequate sanction. A court whose orders could not be enforced would lose its authority and sink into insignificance. Two methods of sanction have been suggested—the sanction of industrial boycott and the sanction of armed force. In the Conference of the League of Nations held in 1916 in the United States the order of procedure against a sinning nation was laid down as first by the economic boycott and then by military force. The League of Nations is a serious and sane solution for the world's ill, and steps should be taken to formulate its organization on an effective basis.

Fact versus Dogma

Sir Oliver Lodge is bewildered by the fact that Christian orthodoxy continues to refuse to listen to the arguments and to use the findings of the field of psychical research. Under the foregoing caption he makes a plaintive appeal to the church in the January number of the *Nineteenth Century and After*. Of course the church has on the whole opposed discovery. Yet Christian faith cannot be kept immune from the influence of scientific investigation. It opposed astronomy and geology but was forced to yield. Is the modern church determined always to maintain this attitude and give way only when the forward drive of lay opinion is too strong?

He thinks the facts of psychical research ought to be welcomed by the church. Yet clerical objection is made against medium-

ship; it is called necromancy. One would have thought that Christianity, by diverting attention from the discarded body and concentrating more on the risen soul, would have justified and vivified a belief that the living and the departed were still all one family and all equally servants of a God to whom death and time were as nothing compared with life and absolute being. Therefore we might have supposed that Christianity would prepare our minds for intercourse with the departed. But modern churchmen limit spiritual intercourse to the distant past and treat the dead as for practical purposes nonexistent. They say Jesus would have condemned mediumship as necromancy. But do they not claim that Jesus really brought back the spirit of the boy at Nain? And what of Lazarus? Never in our rudimentary dealings with the dead do we think for a moment of the resuscitation of a corpse. The communion with the dead on the Mount of Transfiguration is nearer to the phenomena of modern mediumship. To believe in mediumship today makes belief in these old records possible. Mediumship, moreover, brings great comfort to many sorrowing ones. Will the church continue to denounce and oppose it? "If they persist in doing so, it will be at the peril not of themselves but of the church they hold dear. If the church truly has the privilege of a permanently guiding Divine Spirit it surely ought to be ready to receive new revelations of Divine truth." Christians who believe the records of the Bible cannot condemn spiritistic phenomena. Why cannot the church, with its marvelous possibilities, meet the facts of psychical research with a welcome?